

RON WATSON, Ph.D.
Legislative District 23
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Judicial Proceedings Committee



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The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 10, 2022

Chair Clipping, Vice-Chair Moon, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present this legislation before you today.

SB 884 is a bill that makes an exception to the driver's license suspension statute for child support obligors making less than 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. Mobility is key in Maryland's regional economy. The Census Bureau reported in 2019 that almost 50% of Marylanders travel outside of their county for employment. This statistic is more pronounced for lower-income communities of color where there is a scarcity of jobs available by public transit. For example, only 9% of jobs in the Baltimore region can be reached within one hour, one-way by public transit. Moreover, many employers in these communities won't hire individuals without a valid license as driving is central to the position (construction, UBER, Grubhub, door-to-door sales).

In 2015, NPR reported that 62% of Marylanders who owe child support make less than minimum wage, but owe at least \$10,000 in unpaid arrearages. They will never pay down this debt, especially when the current law magnifies the issue by crippling their mobility.

Federal Code 42 U.S.C.A. § 666 (a) demands that all states have laws that "increase the effectiveness of the [child support enforcement] program which the state administers" and allows the State to withhold, suspend, or restrict licenses of individuals owing child support in "appropriate cases" (16). However, our current suspension practices may have already left us out of compliance since we are effectively preventing lower-income obligors from the employment needed to pay their obligation.

As such, Maryland should pass Senate Bill 884 to repeal driver's license suspensions as a penalty for obligors who make less than \$39k per year (300% FPL). License suspensions for workers at that income level cannot be considered "appropriate" or increasing "effectiveness" as it: (1) wastes taxpayer dollars in collections enforcement, (2) prohibits and eliminates access to employment for workers and job seekers, and (3) heightens tensions between the custodial parties which, in turn, decreases compliance rates.

SB 884 received a favorable ruling in the Judicial Proceedings Committee and also received a unanimous vote of 46-0 on the senate floor.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable committee report on SB 884.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron L. Watson".

Senator Ron Watson

Legislative District 23